



CHEHALIS INDIAN BAND

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Chehalis Indian Band Re-opens St'epsum (20-Mile Bay Provincial Campground)

Chehalis Indian Band has negotiated an interim agreement with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts which allows the 20 Mile Campground on the west side of Harrison Lake to re-open on Friday, August 15th, 2008. The campground is situated on an ancient Chehalis village named St'epsum. The campground was closed down July 30th amid controversy over jurisdiction and mismanagement of the site by the previous contract holder. A five year contract to manage the site was awarded to the Douglas First Nation in 2003 without consultation with the Chehalis Indian Band. The land has also been identified as treaty settlement land for the In-SHUCK-ch, an organization made up of the Douglas, Skatin and Samahquam First Nations.

The Chehalis people held a community gathering at the 20 Mile Bay Campground on July 25th to emphasize their connection to their ancestral village of St'epsum where a number of their ancestors are laid to rest. The land was blessed and a marker was placed in memory and honor of their ancestors buried there. A traditional naming ceremony was held where ancestral names of people of their St'epsum village were bestowed on descendants of the families that lived there. It was a very moving ceremony for many of the people gathered there.

This was part of Chief Willie Charlie's promise to honor Chehalis elder John Leon's (Kuya's) last request before he died last year to protect the old village site of St'epsum. Kuya's two siblings are laid to rest on Long Island (Hikw Tl'tsas, Island of the dead) that is located directly east of St'epsum.

However, almost immediately after the ceremony, the marker erected as a memorial was removed and taken from the site. The Chehalis people viewed this as a desecration of a grave site. Many people were angered, hurt and saddened by this disrespectful act. This all resulted in the closure of the campground.

After much negotiation and the return of the memorial marker an interim agreement was reached between the parties which includes a commitment from

the Ministry to negotiate an agreement with Chehalis to manage the site next year.

On Wednesday, August 13th, 2008 another ceremony was held to bless and cleanse the site and re-erect the returned memorial marker. A number of Chehalis community members including elders, elected band council members, staff and children attended. Also in attendance to show support was Ruth Adams, a band council member of the Tsawwassen First Nation. Ruth is also a descendant of one of the St'epsum Village families who received a name at the previous gathering. Chief Ernie Campbell of the Musqueam First Nation was also in attendance to show his support. The ceremonial work was carried out by Gwen Point.

Chief Willie Charlie has been meeting with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, Ministry of Forests and Range, the RCMP, and the other First Nations involved. A representative of the BC Treaty Commission has also participated at meetings. The Ministry of Forests and Range and the RCMP have committed additional enforcement officers to help in maintaining enhanced public safety standards.

Chief Charlie stated that, "People must have respect for the site to have it re-opened. We would like to attract more families to the site and discourage the rowdy party crowd that often frequents the area. We want to establish a more family-oriented campground. There will be no tolerance for excessive alcohol consumption, for all illegal drugs, and any more vandalism as has been going on there in the past. We will be enforcing this. The Chehalis people are willing to share their scenic, beautiful site of St'epsum. All we ask is that people respect it."

For more information contact:

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